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Thoughts on the Affairs
of Bengal

By
Archibald Keir, Esq.

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THOUGHTS

ON THE

AFFAIRS of BENGAL.

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Act 1773". Carraccioli II. 107

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L O N D O N,

Printed in the Year 1772.

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THOUGHTS

ON THE

AFFAIRS of BENGAL.

THE affairs of India in general, and of Bengal in particular, have so much ingrossed the attention of the public for some time past, and are now become of such consequence to the nation, that every individual who either thinks he can throw new light on the subject, or that he can give any useful hints for the better ordering and regulating those important matters, needs make no apology for so laudable an attempt, whatever may be the effect or success of his endeavours. Seeing many sensible, and

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ingenious men too, who have of late taken much pains, to point out to the public the bad management in the government of those rich and fruitful countries; while few, very few I think, have but attempted to lay down any rational, complete, and consistent plan, by which it might be rendered better; it will be the more excusable in me, I hope, who, though I have made those things my study, and long resided in those distant parts, find myself no ways capable of giving my ideas in that elegance of dress and propriety, either in words, or in order, as I could wish, and as is due to so critical and discerning a judge. Yet, as I find that the productions which have the most of plain truth and common sense in them, though in the simplest apparel, are often more pleasing to mankind in general, than those which are far more elegant; and being perhaps somewhat flattered by my own conceit, or rather induced, as I imagine, by the persuasion and favourable opinion of some sensible friends, who have approved of my way of thinking, I shall

shall therefore venture, in the few following pages, to explain, what, in my humble opinion, would be the most rational and best method of redressing the grievances complained of, and of fixing on a just and solid foundation the management and right government of Bengal.

And though it may be thought, that in a disquisition of this nature, it would be most proper to begin at the fountain head, and consider whether or not our home establishment of a Company and Court of Directors, or what other form of government would be best; yet when I consider, that this is a subject which has already often been discussed by many abler pens; and that it is a subject too, which would carry me beyond the bounds of my present purpose, while it lies within the reach of every one who will give himself but the trouble to read and reflect; I shall say nothing more, than to declare, in a very few words, what is my opinion of this; and that in the most candid and impartial manner that I possibly can.

The general sentiments then of this, and of all the trading nations in Europe, after repeated trials, and much argument, both for and against, seem now almost to be fixed and agreed, that the trade to those distant countries, could, in no respect, be carried on to so much advantage as by exclusive companies. Though the French are again indeed making another trial of this ; with what success, time will discover. But the trade *there*, to this nation, is now not the only object. For there has of late been acquired a very extensive territorial dominion : and people are to be ruled on principles very different from those necessary to be employed in the conducting of mere mercantile concerns. It has been alleged therefore, that merchants should not be sovereigns ; and it has been concluded from thence, that the East India Company are improper to govern and protect the countries they have either subdued by their arms, or which have voluntarily submitted to their authority. The premises may be easily admitted, perhaps ; but that the proposition,

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tion, in its full extent, should be so, tho' it seems somewhat to carry the appearance of reason, is what I am persuaded can never be agreed to, by any who have the sense to distinguish the meaning of words. The conclusion therefore, which, in my opinion, is absolutely false and erroneous, must fall to the ground of itself. For, not to instance the Dutch, or many of the most powerful states in Europe, is not our own legislature composed principally of merchants, and of mercantile men? And are not the mercantile concerns of this, and of most countries now-a-days, so intimately connected with their prosperity and well-being, that the great concern of governments is to put them on a right and respectable footing?

But the affairs of India, and of Bengal, are the affairs of the nation, and of consequence therefore to the nation that they be managed well. The question is only this then, Who are the people of the nation, the most likely to manage them the rightest and best? Whether the king's
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ministers, who can scarce, I think, be supposed to be so well acquainted with them; and who have numberless other affairs upon their hands; *hands*, which it would be not so easy a matter to tie up by laws. Or if they should be managed by a set of men, who, if chosen right, would give their principal care and attention to them alone; men, who if chosen right, might be supposed at least to know something of them; and men too, who would certainly be more within the reach of laws, wisely made, and well calculated for their right government. That it should rather be the latter, therefore, will, I believe, scarce bear an argument.

As to what has been proposed by some, with regard to dividing the management, in leaving the Company to carry on the trade, and letting the Ministry, or the Government, as it is called, have the charge of the revenue, and protection of the country, by officers named and appointed by the king; it is a scheme big with so many inconveniences and objections, that it surprises me to see so sensible

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ble a writer, as the author of the Observations on the present State of the East India Company's Affairs, adopt such a plan. The great objection to managing by a Court of Directors, is, that many of them are mere merchants, unacquainted with the state of India, confined in their notions, and consequently unfit either to be statesmen or sovereigns. It is said also, and with some degree of truth, perhaps, that their attention, which is so much taken up in securing their elections, and their uncertainty of continuing in office, is a cause, and a very principal cause, of that neglect and remissness which has been of late so much complained of; with, or without reason, I shall not pretend to say. But as these are evils, which in part either may be remedied, or which with equal validity may be objected to the British legislature, or to every order and society of men, till the contrary be made appear, and that it be proved, that the management would be better to be entrusted in the hands of the Government, or with any other set of
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men, I can see no kind of just reason for changing the mode at present established, of managing by a Court of Directors. More especially if it be considered, that while things are in this channel, the Ministry will always be a kind of check upon them; and not very backward possibly, in passing any popular laws, which might help to keep them within proper bounds, or in hindering any unpopular laws to be passed, which the Court of Directors, from mistaken principles, might be desirous of getting enacted. Instances of which having actually happened, will readily occur to every one, who is at all acquainted with India affairs.

Wholesome and just laws are the very essence and fundamentals of all good governments. For as no civil society can well subsist, where neither property is secured, or crimes are punished, as has been but too much the case, perhaps, for some time past in those rich and fruitful countries; so it is clear, I believe, even without a demonstration, that settled and established rules, to protect the helpless,
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and punish crimes, to secure both the persons and properties of individuals, against the lusts and rapacity of others, ought to be the first and grand object, with those who want to avail themselves of the advantages to be drawn from any kingdom, country, or society of men.

To point out a proper method, by which this is the most likely to be effectuated, is the difficulty; and a difficulty not easy to be surmounted. To attempt this, and to endeavour to shew the means by which we are the most likely to obtain so desirable an end, is the purport of the present disquisition. How far I may succeed in the attempt, must be judged of by the impartial and disinterested world. For though others have attempted this already, and that many sensible and judicious remarks have been made, yet still there is much wanting, I believe, while every one who has candour and discernment, or in proportion, at least, as he has any share of those, and is acquainted with the subject, will add light, and be of service to the public in so important a concern.

In all ages and nations of the world, it has ever been esteemed the most arduous and difficult task, to form adequate and right laws for the government of society. While the most complete system that ever yet has been made, may in numberless instances be found inconsistent with the general good, and contradictory even of the very intention for which they were instituted. Nay, in our own country, we daily see that *particular laws*, framed with all the care and attention of the most intelligent amongst us, tried, and rectified upon trial; and rectified, sometimes, a second and a third time; yet can scarce be made to answer the intention after all.

Such is the temper of men, and frailty of human wisdom! As we are not therefore to look for any thing perfect here, the utmost we can reasonably expect to obtain, in a matter of this nature, is only a certain degree of perfection, which will be more or less so, according to the sober, sensible, and right judgment that we shall have made use of, in obtaining the desired end.

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‘In framing a system of laws, for any people, or society of men, it would be of consequence, surely, to set out on some fixed and steady principles and plan. It would be well, also, I think; first, carefully, to take a survey, and, in general, make ourselves acquainted somewhat, if possible, with the temper and disposition of the human mind, so as to know how, and in what manner, it is variously affected. And if we reflect upon this with that coolness, benignity, and charity, which we ought, we shall find, I believe, that mankind, in general, pretty much follow, or endeavour at least to follow, their own, or what they take to be their own interest, and that as nearly as is possible. The difference between virtue and vice being nothing more, than as the difference between good-sense and folly. But mankind are far from being altogether wise. Even the wisest amongst us is not always so, either for himself or for others. Good and wholesome laws then, should be nothing more than the lessons of wisdom, adapted to the meanest capacity, in pre-

venting men from hurting themselves, or hurting one another, whether by their art, or by their strength. What indeed alone, and simply concerns themselves, or in all that is within their own breasts, no human laws can, with any justice, or ought in any degree to intermeddle.

These are principles, which are so self-evident, I think, that they will scarce be controverted by the sensible and discerning part of mankind : and they are so very general too, that they will apply to all ranks and societies of men.

Nations, however, as well as individuals, have very different notions of right and of wrong ; of what is useful, and of what is hurtful ; and, therefore, of civil liberty also. So that in framing laws and rules for the right government of any nation or people, if we are desirous of rendering them in any degree happy and content ; their notions of right and wrong, of what is useful and hurtful, or of civil liberty in general, must be attended to ; and that not in a superficial and slight manner, but with the minutest care and exact-

exactness. In short, their dispositions and humours must be known; their religion, prejudices, and fancies; also the virtues and vices they are most prone to, before any thing can be done with propriety in a matter of such delicacy and niceness. But the notions and dispositions, as well as the religion, prejudices, virtues, and vices, are so very different with the people of Bengal, from what they are with the people here, that to think the British laws, or British system of government, though the very best in the world perhaps, could make them immediately peaceable and happy, is absurd and contradictory to the clearest and most evident principles of human nature. And if it be asked, how then is a system of laws to be formed for them? or are they to be left, as they now are, to the discretion, and at the mercy of their masters, which some would call their tyrants? Their condition, to be sure, at present, is deplorable, having in a great measure lost the advantages, while they preserve all the disadvantages of a despotic and absolute

solute government. For while their customs, which were in the nature of laws to them, are set at nought; and that those who were their rulers formerly, are now depressed, swarms of little tyrants must of course start up every where, under very little controul; which, of all tyrants, are the most cruel and oppressive. As to the English law, which has been introduced into some of our principal settlements, it is my firm opinion, that the natives there would have been greatly better without it.

It is, however, inconsistent with the wisdom and equity, it is greatly inconsistent with the real interest of the British nation, to leave them in the condition they now are. And it remains then only to be determined, how, by whom, and in what manner things are most likely to be rectified, so that a regular government shall be fixed and established, on a settled and solid foundation.

That the British legislature cannot so very properly be the immediate agents in this, will appear pretty evident, I imagine

gine, from the principles here already laid down. For notwithstanding all the numerous accounts and informations they have had, of the nature, dispositions, &c. of those distant people, yet, I am clearly of opinion, they are far, very far, from having such just and distinct notions of those affairs, as might enable them to form a true and right judgment in a matter of so much importance. The same objection will equally hold good against the East India Company, or their Court of Directors, being intrusted with such a business; over and above what might be said, in their having, on several occasions, shewn so strong an inclination to heap power upon their servants abroad, without, perhaps, sufficiently considering, as is alledged, the consequences to themselves, or to the countries which were under their dominion. The British legislature, however, should, without all manner of doubt, I think, be the ultimate judges and establishers of whatever system should be adopted; as it would be both the most for the honour of the
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nation, and for the advantage of all concerned. And as to the ground, on which I would propose that they should fix their opinion, it should be this :

There should be two, or more persons, if thought necessary, sent to India, on this very account alone : there, *that is in Bengal*, to remain during the space of two years, at least ; to inspect every thing which might in any ways tend to make them perfect masters of what they were sent upon. And in the course of that time, they should not only apply themselves diligently to their getting all kind of useful information, but they should go on likewise, in forming a system of regulations and rules, for the correcting of abuse, and right government of the country ; which, when completed, at the expiration of the time stipulated, should be brought home, and laid before the legislature and public, to be approved or rejected, either in part or in whole, agreeable to the good-sense and equity, that should appear in all, and in every part of it. And to enable the British legislature and public the
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better to judge of the performance, and of the propriety, or impropriety of the system in general, and of each law in particular; the persons who were sent, along with their laws and system, should give their reasons in the most full and distinct manner, both on the general plan, and on each particular regulation, which people here otherwise might not so readily comprehend.

But there being many things, with respect to the revenue, and with regard to trade, of which hereafter, that might immediately be rectified; they ought to have full power and authority to rectify those upon the spot, by their orders and directions to the governor and council, which these should be instructed to obey. What was to be performed by them in this manner, however, ought to be pointed out to them as clearly and distinctly as possible, or as the nature of the thing would allow; that more might not be left to their discretion, than what was absolutely necessary for the good of the Company,

and of the people whom they were sent to relieve.

Those to be sent, on such an occasion, ought to be persons of the most approved integrity, industrious, and discerning. To be acquainted with the country, and with the affairs of the Company there, are requisites likewise, which, I imagine, will appear absolutely necessary. It may be said, that they ought to be lawyers also, bred and practised in the courts here. But although their being men of letters, acquainted with civil law, with the laws of Britain, and the practice of the courts here, would most certainly be of great utility to them in the execution of such a work; yet the knowledge of the law alone, such as is usually learned in Westminster-hall, could scarcely, I think, render them entirely fit for such an undertaking. Were there three going out therefore, I would propose, that one of them should be an intelligent lawyer, who had been used to practice; provided also, he was of good character, as to probity and integrity: qualities, which are
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of much greater consequence, both in this, and in most affairs of life, than the utmost knowledge, either in law, or in any thing else indeed.

It would, no doubt, be right, that they should be put upon the most respectable footing, to enable them to discharge effectually and properly, the duty that they were sent upon. I would therefore propose, that they should be named by the Company, as their supervisors, whose expence should be bore, and who should have suitable salaries, assigned them, they not being allowed to trade in any respect. It should farther, I think, be signified to them, that, as a reward for their merit and industry, if, upon their return home, it should be found they had executed their commission with probity, discretion, and judgment, they should have pensions allowed them for life, with some honourary mark of the Company's approbation and regard.

From such an arrangement, and if the instructions were clear and distinct, the people who were sent would have no kind of temptation, and would even have it al-

most out of their power to do mischief: whereas, were they men of sense and discretion, they would have it greatly in their power to do good; and to acquire both profit and high renown to themselves, the strongest incitements in the human mind to industry and the most noble actions. Also the people whom they went to relieve, would be happy in the thoughts of the advantages they were soon likely to obtain; and that there was so near a prospect of their ease and relief. They would be doubly so, were they to find that men of sense, and of prudence, who could enter somewhat, and have a proper sympathy for their prejudices, with regard to their religion and customs, were to have the primary moving and conducting so laudable an intention. And the men of sense amongst them again, would, of course, naturally open their minds upon such an occasion; which would reflect light, and be of infinite use in promoting the general good.

The great objection to the sending supervisors, on the plan formerly adopted,

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was the exorbitant power given them, and the too little care that was taken to point out to them, what either they were to have done, or what they were not to have done ; so that they were left with a dictatorial and absolute authority, without control, both to make and to execute laws. For although it be alledged, that they were just and good men who were pitched upon on that occasion ; yet it being universally known, that the very best men who ever have been, and who ever will be perhaps, have their passions and foibles ; and that there is not a readier way in the world to spoil a real good man, than by giving him excessive power ; so there is no wonder, therefore, that such a scheme of supervisorship should have been totally disapproved of by many sensible and judicious people. With the alterations, however, and on the plan that is here proposed, it is perhaps the only good method, that can ever be made effectual to answer so desirable an end.

As to the plan lately proposed, of sending judges, it appears to me, and to many others,

others, I believe, to be much worse than the former, with all the objections to it on its first establishment. For in sending people of great knowledge in the law from this, they must either have been instructed to have judged by the laws of this country, or else they must have been permitted to have formed a set of laws for themselves; and that in a country they were unacquainted with; where, at present, there is either no law, or no written law at least. But if the former of those methods had been adopted, it would have been entirely incompatible with the religion, customs, and dispositions of the people. Over and above, that many new regulations must have taken place, to alter the whole system of the country, before that any such thing could have taken effect. If the latter had been preferred, which I believe was intended, they must have been sent both with legislative and judicial authority; which would have been entirely repugnant to all the principles of civil liberty, or to any hopes we could ever possibly entertain of doing justice

tice to the wretched inhabitants; which every-body in this country seems now to have so much at heart. So, to me, it appears evident, that the judges who are there already, should we even suppose them as bad as they have been by some represented to be, which I am far from thinking is the case; yet, being bred, and having lived so many years in the country, they might still be looked upon as greatly more fit to be intrusted with such a power, than people sent immediately from hence, unacquainted with the customs of Bengal, and desirous, therefore, very probably, to reduce every thing to their ideas of British liberty, which I am certain could have no good effect.

It may be here asked, perhaps, why may not those gentlemen, who are there already, many of whom, the present governor especially, are well known, and, I know myself, to be men of great worth and integrity, do all that is requisite in the proposed plan? And how comes it about, that things in so short a time, under their, or their predecessors governments,

ments, should have actually grown, and seem daily to be growing so much worse?

As to the former of these questions, that they should not be so fit as could be wished, will appear from the principles which I have above laid down; besides, that they have many other avocations, which must fully employ their attention, if executed to purpose. It must be observed, likewise, that they have been bred up in the service, and are now the servants of the Company, whom the proposed regulations would principally affect. Many of them too, perhaps, have been long accustomed to think, that power, without control, was of the greatest benefit both to them and the community. It being but too much the temper of mankind, to desire power to themselves, and those of their own sect, although they might be anxious enough, and very clearly see, the propriety of restraining it in every body else.

How that things should have grown so much worse, and should seem daily to be tending the same way, is a matter that

requires a longer discussion, and is not quite so easy to be made evident. As it is a matter, however, of the greatest importance to know ; and as it would throw new light on what I am afraid is at present not quite so clear, notwithstanding what has been so sensibly said on the subject by others ; I shall endeavour, in as few words as possible, and in the best manner I can, to point out what appears to me the principal and efficient causes ; and, I hope, the true state of the matter also. Were the disease once rightly known and understood indeed, the remedy, no doubt, might more easily be investigated. Whereas, the attempting a cure, without first thoroughly being acquainted with the disease, is acting but as ignorant quacks, who apply their nostrums to all patients alike, without distinction either of constitution or disease.

The universal cry, and what has generally been assigned as the cause of all the evils complained of, is the bad management of the Rulers in Bengal, and the bad management of the Rulers in Leaden-

hall-street. That effects must flow from causes, and that bad management will produce evils, is clear and evident to every body. But, effects being seen and felt, when causes are hid ; and it being much easier to point out where there is bad management, than to lay down a rational and just plan of doing better ; so all men, almost from the highest to the lowest, looking upon themselves as wise enough to direct others, and having, in their own minds, medicines, as it were, for the cure of all diseases, which they are quick-sighted enough in discovering ; when things do not exactly go to their fancies, they immediately see mismanagement ; to which their first and universal remedy is, that the physicians should be changed. What they would probably next propose, if they durst, without being laughed at, is, that they themselves should be put in their place. For my own part, however, on the most strict and impartial consideration of the matter, I am far from thinking, that either the gentlemen of Leaden-hall-street, or that those who have had
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the more immediate management of Bengal of late, are such base and cruel tyrants, as by some they have been endeavoured to be represented. As to the former, indeed, except a very few, they are but little known to me. As to the latter, I am personally acquainted with every one of them, and can declare, that so far as I am able to judge, they are in general men of as good principles, and of as liberal ways of thinking, as any set of men whatsoever. That both the one and the other, have not acted impolitically and harshly towards individuals, at times, is what I will not pretend to say; as I know it to be otherwise; having myself felt, and severely felt, the effects of their rigour, and, as I thought, very ill-judged policy. Which I complained of, and loudly complained of, to themselves; but to very little purpose, and without any kind of redress.

I do not admit, however, that the evils complained of, have been altogether, or even in greatest part, owing to the misconduct, and many enormous vices as is

alleged of the rulers and directors. But they have arose from fortuitous causes in a great measure; and from people who had different views and ideas of things, succeeding quickly one another; applying partial and ineffectual remedies; and sometimes remedies, indeed, which produced effects, the very opposite of what were expected and intended. A very remarkable instance of which occurs, in the altering the nature of the coin; which, though principally proposed, and effectuated by one, who I both take to be an honest, and a sensible man; yet it has been productive of more evils, than any one thing whatsoever; and evils too, which I am persuaded will be felt for years yet. Notwithstanding, even of the very sensible and judicious plan, which, I am glad to find, is now about to be adopted, in order to rectify and establish, on a just and solid basis, a matter of such essential importance. Another cause likewise, which cannot surely be called accidental; has been, what in my humble opinion, was the bad policy on the one hand,

of sending the money out, and, on the other, of hindering the money to come in to Bengal. The former having been done avowedly, and by orders from home too, to a very considerable extent, over and above what was exported by foreign nations ; while the other was effectuated by means of the large sums of money given to strangers, which hindered their bringing in what they must otherwise have been necessitated to do. For though it may be alledged, that it was at a time when the Company were greatly in debt, and could not, therefore, otherwise have raised the money for their China investments, for the supply of their other settlements, and for the large draughts that must else have been made upon them, had they opened their cash for remittances. Yet it being here my intention, only to point out the causes of the distress in Bengal, I shall but briefly remark, that this surely has been none of the smallest.

But a real accidental evil, which created the cruelest misery and distress that ever was felt perhaps in any country, was the
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two years severe famine, owing to the failure of the crops. And yet this too, tho' most evidently and conspicuously the work of Providence alone, has been in a great measure laid to the account of the unfortunate rulers; for it has been confidently averred, that they contributed, at least, greatly to encrease it, by hoarding up the rice in their granaries, and obliging the people, dying with hunger, to pay an extravagant price for it. But, unluckily for those who assert this, while they shew more of malice than of judgment and charity; like most others actuated by so unworthy a passion, they make use of an argument, which, though admitted in its fullest extent, must only serve to prove the very reverse of what they intended to prove. For although the fact were even true, which may greatly, I think, be doubted of; or, if they did buy up rice, and keep it till it became dear, was this either more or less, than obliging the thoughtless multitude, to become sooner and greater œconomists than they otherwise would have been: the means, of course,

course, of making their scanty allowance hold out the longer, and of saving thereby the lives of many thousands.

Another accidental cause, and a great one too, of the late distresses in Bengal, has been owing, as I hinted above, from the change of the police that has imperceptibly arose from the change of government; for formerly a nabob, who had absolute power, could upon any complaint, and would have been seldom very backward most probably, to call zemindars or others before him, strip them of their ill-acquired wealth, or otherwise to punish them, according to the nature of their offence. Zemindars, and other inferior officers again, had a like power over those who were under them. Now, however, things are quite different; for where an Englishman resides, a zemindar, or even a nabob, has scarce almost the shadow of power left. The English and the English banians, now a days, are the people in Bengal, who keep the nabob, the zemindars, and every body else in the country in awe. What kind of people therefore, those banians are, what their office and

profession is, it will be necessary, I believe, to give some little account of.

Banians, then, in general, are a numerous set of people, who are bred up, and apply themselves from their infancy to the knowledge of accounts, to the art of buying and selling, and of trade. They begin their profession usually in small matters, serving as runners or under-clerks to Banians of greater consequence. Being the clerks over the whole country, where there are no Englishmen, their progress is never so rapid. But in our settlements, as no man almost, who has the smallest matter to lay out is without his banian, so their first exhibition there is commonly in a double capacity, both, to wit, in that of serving some other banian, and in serving Europeans when they first arrive, when their layings-out are not very great. Their profits, it may thus be imagined, can, at first, be but small then. The knowledge they in this way acquire, however, of the tempers and dispositions of our countrymen, as well as of our language, is ever after of the greatest consequence to them ;
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for, if by assiduity and attention, or by any more unworthy means, they can but recommend themselves to one in the Company's service; or to any one who can recommend them to a young gentleman in the service as he arrives, their fortunes are, as it were, made. For their masters, if they do but live, and are not very bad indeed, must infallibly rise to power; when their banians, of course, cannot fail to become rich and great men. Even in the service of other banians, they often have the art and address to transplant their masters, get them turned off, and place themselves in their stead. It is no uncommon thing, therefore, to see one of those, who was but the other day a dirty fellow, at a few rupees a month, and with scarce a whole gown to his back, become suddenly, and all at once as it were, a man of power, authority, and riches, giving law perhaps to half a province, and attended too with a surprising retinue of servants, and others of his own cast, whose principles and education are like his own; so that they are ever ready to obey his nod; and to do, or

even to swear what he pleases. And if it should so happen, that the master should rise to be a governor or a great man, like a Sykes, the banian, of course, becomes a man of far greater consequence than the poor nabob; nay, perhaps, of much more consequence and authority also, that is, with the natives, than even the master himself. But to have people of such principles, as those must be imagined to be from their education and office, in the highest departments of an absolute government, it may, I think, be conceived, that the consequences will be of the very worst kind; many cruel instances of which might here be set forth; but that is foreign to my purpose.

Another evil, which may be called accidental, arises also from the change in the government, by which things are become greatly worse for the people, than what they were under their own native sovereigns; and this I apprehend to proceed from that of their present rulers being merchants, and merchants too under no check or control, whose business and trade

trade is carried on under the care and management of their worthy and upright banians; people whom I have known not scruple to make use of the troops of the Company, for the purposes of buying and selling to advantage for themselves and their masters; and that without ever troubling, or, perhaps, even asking the permission of their indulgent lords *on so slight an occasion*, who, it may be well imagined, would, in return, be not over anxious to be troubled with *frivolous complaints against such faithful and industrious servants*.

Another, and a very principal cause of the grievances complained of, which cannot altogether be called an accidental cause, though, in some respects, it really is so, arises, as I take it, from the unjust and impolitic use of *dustucs*, *perwanas*, and *chowkeys*. But, the better to make the English reader comprehend this, it will be first necessary to explain somewhat of the nature and use of those, and that with respect to the former and present state of the government; from which

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alone, the effects they must now naturally produce will appear pretty evident.

To begin with the last of them ; chowkeys are little custom-houses all over the country, under each zemindar, where duties formerly were, and now are collected in an arbitrary and oppressive manner. The duties collected belong to the zemindar who rents the district, as part of the emoluments of the land, while, in his accounts with the government, an allowance is made to him, to support the expence of the chowkey or chowkeys which he either does, or is supposed to keep up. This charge is certainly a heavy article upon government ; and that it is a great hurt to trade is most manifest, which is taken notice of by Mr. Sykes, in his letter of the 31st of October, 1765, as quoted by Mr. Bolts. He writes there, indeed, of regulating this affair ; but whether there has been any thing effectual done in it as yet, is what I very much doubt of.

Perwanas, again, though in general signifying orders, and as such comprehending duties also ; yet are here meant
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in a more confined sense, and as orders of protection and assistance, formerly granted by the nabobs to banians, dalals, and merchants. They were directed to zemindars, or other officers, commanding them to be aiding and assisting to the bearer, whether in buying or selling of goods. Perwanas are now granted for like purposes, by the governor of Calcutta, and by the English chiefs, or subordinate governors, within their own districts and jurisdictions. These, however, have more or less effect, according to the power and authority of the person, by whom, and on whose account, they are granted.

Dustucs, are passports, or orders for passing the goods or merchandise therein specified, duty free, without let or molestation from all chowkeys. This power was formerly exercised by the nabobs alone; and that probably very sparingly, till about the year 1716, that the Company got their Grand Firmaun, as it is called, from the emperor; since which, their dustucs in Bengal, have, in general, had the effect of passing both their own
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goods, and those of their servants, duty-free. They have been obliged, indeed, to make considerable presents, from time to time, to the nabobs on this account, over and above the annual payment to the emperor, as stipulated in their Firmaun.

That dusters and perwanas then, in former times, should have been of the greatest consequence to the Company, and well worth the sums that were expended to obtain the power of granting them, will appear on the slightest reflection. And that the indulgence then given to their servants, was but just and reasonable, can no ways be doubted. They were then only traders, and their servants were the same. Even their trade too was confined within narrow limits, and that of their servants was but very inconsiderable. To get their goods, therefore, sold, and to be allowed to buy others, without being subject to the avarice and caprice of every petty officer, was certainly of the greatest consequence, both to them, and to their servants. Now, however, that they are become the sovereigns of the country,

country, and that their servants are their deputies and merchants too, whose passion for riches and ambition does not appear to be less than that of the rest of mankind; to allow them such a privilege, to the hurt of themselves, and ruin of their other subjects, is, no doubt, impolitic, and ruinous in the highest degree. It is the policy of every wise government, indeed, to treat all their peaceable subjects as nearly alike as possible; and to render the intercourse between the people of the same country, as easy and commodious as can be. But alas! the present policy in Bengal is the very reverse of this; in so much, that goods, the very necessaries of life, even rice itself, is often sold a hundred per cent. dearer at one place than another, though at not above a day's journey distance. Yet this, sure, can be imputed to nothing else, than to the impolitic and oppressive use of chowkeys, dustucs, and perwanas. It may be said, perhaps, that were these taken away, and it has been so said, I know, that it would then not be worth the while of gentlemen to be

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be in the service of the Company in Bengal. This, however, I deny; though this, I am sensible, is the only grand impediment, which ever can at all, and which actually, I believe, stands now in the way of an alteration and improvement. But if ever it will bear to be debated, whether the interest of the Company, or that of the servants of the Company, ought most to be attended to; or whether the very being and prosperity of a rich and populous country, ought to be put in competition with that of a few individuals, I may drop the argument; it being an argument, I am persuaded, which can be nowhere maintained, but in the meridian of Calcutta; where, it is true, I have often heard it done. Here, therefore, I think, that supervisors might be usefully employed, and greatly so too; and in a business which I am of opinion can never be well performed without them. Nay, were they but to be sent on this alone, and that they should execute it with propriety and judgment, the Company would be great gainers, were they even to pay them double

ble of what was intended for their former supervisors ; for it appears to me evident, that unless regular custom-houses are established, in place of the numberless and oppressive chowkeys ; and that dustucs and perwanas, in trade, shall be absolutely taken away ; and that by people upon the spot, who shall have an authority superior to that of the governour and council so to do ; they are abuses, that are likely ever to remain, till the country be either ruined or taken from us. Being thoroughly convinced, that so sure as this is a measure repugnant to the immediate interest of the gentlemen in the service there, so sure also will it ever be opposed ; as it partly already has been, I believe, in spite of the most positive orders of their distant superiors to the contrary. Or, were they ever even to pretend to execute it, it would be done only in such a manner, I am afraid, as to have the appearance of obedience, while the evils complained of, would, in effect, be left unredressed.

Were the regulations proposed, respecting chowkeys, dustucs, and perwanas, to take place; it may be thought, perhaps, that besides many other advantages, it would be a means also of altering the late adopted policy of the Court of Directors, in that of so much hindering people out of their service, from going to settle to trade in Bengal. This, however, to me, does not appear quite so evident. Nay, I am rather inclined to think, on the most mature and impartial consideration of the matter, that, except at Calcutta, none but those, either mediately or immediately in the service of the Company, ought to be permitted to reside in Bengal.

Europeans, and natives of Bengal, are of a complexion different in mind, no less than in body; timid and submissive these; violent and impetuous the others. That no laws could, with any propriety, put them upon an equality, is absolutely clear therefore; while it is no less evident, that, were it even possible to enact such, they would both be impolitic and highly detrimental to our interest there.

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But subjects of the same state, and under the same sovereigns, ought, no doubt, to be treated as much as possible with the same lenity and compassion too. The penal laws, therefore, of all countries, I believe, affect every body alike almost; regard only being had to their several stations and dependencies. Yet, to put private British subjects and merchants on a footing, as to penal laws, with the natives of Bengal, even the highest amongst them, could never surely be; without either making the penal laws nugatory and ineffectual, with respect to them, or else treating British subjects in a manner, which, I hope, no Briton shall ever be made liable, or exposed to. To think, however, if they could even be put on such a footing, as to penal laws, that they would be so in reality, as merchants and subjects, is what no man, I apprehend, will imagine, who knows any thing of the nature of Bengal, and of the temper of the people there. For it is well known, to those who have been in that country, that all Europeans, and more especially

Englishmen, are looked upon by the natives like people of a higher order and rank of men. A way of thinking, which it will ever be happy for us, and the greatest good policy, to preserve and inculcate. But they, who are looked upon by others in such a light; were they even more modest and prudent, than what we can well ever suppose them to be, or, than what the generality of those who have been there already, have ever shewn themselves to be; still, however, they would carry an awe and superiority with them, inconsistent with equals, and which none but superiours and masters should be endowed with. Were there numerous independent Europeans, therefore, in the interior parts of the country, they could scarce ever be prevented from committing acts of tyranny and oppression; which could not fail to give uneasiness, baffle, and contravene all the best laid schemes of reformation and good policy that possibly could be thought of.

Few very great conveniencies can ever be obtained, without some inconveniencies.

cies. So, although the welfare of individuals, is, no doubt, of the greatest consequence to the nation; yet, it being an universally approved maxim, that the prosperity and well-being of a few, ought ever to give way to the good of the whole; I am therefore confident, if it should appear from what has been here said, or from juster reasons, that the letting a few private persons go to Bengal to make fortunes, will be a hurt and detriment to the nation; it will, surely, both be thought prudent, and politic, to debar them of this advantage, that multitudes may prosper and be happy. Whereas, if the contrary can be made appear, it will certainly give me, and every one who wishes well to his country, and is a friend to mankind, the greatest pleasure and satisfaction.

If it should be asked, however, that, as there must be penal laws, and British laws, for those in the service of the Company, why may not the same be extended with equal propriety and fitness to every other natural born subject of his majesty, who
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might chuse to reside in any part of Bengal? My answer to it is, that though there is no doubt, but what there must be such laws, yet I would propose, that they should be executed at Calcutta only, as is now practised; where private European merchants, as I have said, might be allowed to reside; which would no ways interfere with the laws and policy of the country government; and could, therefore, no ways be productive of the supposed inconveniencies. That private people, on application to the governor, on account of their health, or otherwise, should have leave to go to any subordinate settlement, where there was an English chief, to whose orders, with respect to removing, they should agree, and promise to conform to, is but just and reasonable, and could never sure be denied them. Yet, after all, it may greatly be doubted, I think, notwithstanding what has been confidently asserted by many, whether or not the permission, so much contended for, would be of that advantage to English free-merchants, in the way of fair-traders,

traders, as is alleged and pretended. To me it appears otherwise, provided it should ever so happen, as I hope it soon will, that the trade shall every where be laid open, and be made free to the natives; without their being either harrassed and plundered by chowkeys, or their requiring perwanas and dustucs, for the free purchase and transport of their goods. For in this case I am persuaded, that goods of all kinds, the produce of Bengal; as also those which come in upon the frontiers, would then be sold much cheaper in Calcutta, than were Europeans to go themselves to purchase them; it being well known in that country, that no Europeans of any sort could travel, at any thing near so small a charge and expence as the natives. As to selling goods in the interior parts, the same argument must hold good. So that, in reality, I believe, the only profitable trade for English free-merchants, cou'd only be at Calcutta, in exports and imports to and from other parts of India. A trade, which properly conducted, would be advantageous to them-

themselves, to the Company, and to Bengal in general; and which therefore ought, by all means, to be encouraged.

The next and last case of the grievances, so much complained of, which I shall here take notice of, is with regard to the revenue, and the oppressive manner of collecting it. Yet, the collection, as I understand it, is made nearly in the same manner as what it was formerly: which, though liable to many solid and substantial objections, has now that additional clog upon it, of being too much under the influence of English banians. But the masters of these conscientious gentlemen, being daily shifting, while the putting out and putting in of zemindars, or land renters, is the most lucrative employment that can be had; and it being well known also, that few of them are very punctual in their payments; excuse is never wanted, therefore, either to turn out the old, and put others in their places; or even to keep them in, when the money they should have paid their rent with, is, very probably, bestowed on their
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worthy friends, the banians. That the rents should gradually fall short then from this cause alone, which scarce can be called accidental; and that the people must now be made to suffer more than usual oppression, will appear pretty evident, without much conjuration, I believe.

But were once a complete survey of the lands made, and that the country were properly divided, it would be no very difficult matter, I apprehend, to assess each district, and each village indeed, in such a manner as that they should, in some respect, have the proportioning of every man's quota amongst themselves, to be paid into the hands of collectors, who should receive a certain salary for their trouble; and were this once but rightly established, it would, I am fully persuaded, be a means of relieving the country greatly. It would afford handsome salaries to the collectors also, yet bring a greater and more certain revenue to the government than what has ever been done before. The people would thus likewise know

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what they had to pay ; and if too high assessed, on a proper representation to the board of revenue, could have their grievances relieved and redressed. And it would lead, as I imagine, to another matter that would be of no small importance, and that is with regard to the investments of the Company ; for, as the manufacturers are in general the cultivators of the land, the rent of the land, where it could be done, might be taken in goods ; in which case foreign nations could not so well complain either, were the tenants to be hindred from selling goods to any body, till that the rent of their ground had been paid ; after which there ought to be open markets, under proper regulations, where every body should have free liberty, whether to sell or to buy. All which, if once rightly established, would be of great benefit to the government and ease to the people, more especially in these times, when currency is so scarce. That supervisors, sensible and discreet men, would be most proper to be employed in such an affair, will scarce bear a doubt ; many circumstances

stances being to be attended to there, which no human prudence and foresight could here ever make us masters of.

As to the very sensible and judicious plan proposed by Mr. Dow, which has been enlarged and adopted by Mr. Pattullo, of making lands property in Bengal, I can see no kind of rational objection to it; tho' this no doubt can only be done properly and effectually by an immediate act of the British legislature. The Company and the nation, I am persuaded, would find an infinite advantage from it, and it would make the provinces of Bengal flourish above every other country in Asia. The execution of it too, to me, under the sanction of a British act of parliament appears both practicable and easy; so that I can see no reason to urge why the supervisors should not either carry with them such an act, or that it should at least be sent after them so soon as ever it can be got properly digested and passed.

I have thus endeavoured, in as concise and distinct a manner as possible, to point out what appears to me to have been the

causes, or principal causes, at least, of the evils and grievances of late so much complained of, with respect to Bengal; with the methods by which they are most likely to be redressed, in part or in whole. Yet, after all, though those have been many and great perhaps, still I am not altogether of opinion, that they are as yet so very desperate and incurable, as by some they would be made to be believed. For, while I admit that the people there have of late been rather worse off than they were formerly under their own native sovereigns, I can at the same time very clearly perceive, that with a little just policy and good management, they may not only soon be relieved, but be put even in a much better situation than whatever they enjoyed before: it being always meant and understood, that perfection, or even a very high degree of perfection, is what I have never yet professed or pretended to. Numerous laws, indeed, would not answer the purpose, so well as a few clear and distinct laws wisely framed and rightly adapted to the meridian of the

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country. At first especially, it would be of consequence not to vex and perplex them with a wire-drawn ideal system, and multitude of conceits, which could never fail to disgust the generality of a people who are naturally indolent, and whose minds are not much enlarged; while it would give an opportunity to the artful and designing, to practise with advantage the reigning vices of the country, to wit, cheating and deceit.

What ought first, and most necessarily to be done, I imagine, with regard to laws, would be to finish the survey of the country, if not already completed, and to get as exact an account as possible of the number of inhabitants, their occupations and professions. Pretty just computations might be made of the produce of the ground also, if proper methods were taken with that intention. When this were finished, and that these were obtained, it would be no difficult matter to divide and subdivide the country into proper districts and divisions, in which to establish courts, inferior and superior, at proper
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distances, terminating at last in a general provincial court, and in an appeal to England ; though that only in matters of property of a certain amount. For these courts a written law must be made, in which will lie all the difficulty, and which, according to my notions of things, could never be done properly and completely unless it be begun upon the spot by people of knowledge and discretion ; who, for no short space either, should give their time and application to an affair of such importance, in the way as has been already said. It will require to be as plain and simple, but as clear and distinct as possible. Much, therefore, will need to be left to the discretion of the judges, who, for this reason, ought, no doubt, to be made amenable to superior judges, and so forth to the higher provincial court ; the judges of which may be made answerable for their conduct, not while in office, but before they should depart the country. On which account, I think, that both they, and all Europeans in power and station, should not be permitted to leave the coun-

country till a certain time after their having quitted their employments, and their returning to the condition of private persons ; so that none might be afraid to sue, and that either justice might obtained upon them there, or that proofs might be led in a regular manner, so as to appear against them elsewhere with effect.

The people being not naturally sanguinary in their disposition, but rather fearful and tractable, they easily and without reluctance submit to the will of their masters and rulers, unless when pushed too hard ; their usual remedy for which is to run away to the nearest neighbourhood, where they can have any hopes of being better. Capital punishments, therefore, should rarely, very rarely, be inflicted upon them, and that only for a very few crimes ; for, although according to our way of reasoning, they may, perhaps, be just and right ; yet no reasoning, I am convinced, could ever induce them to think, that so many capital punishments as are in our laws were at all consistent with

justice and humanity. . . Where the use of juries could be introduced amongst them, it would be of excellent service. And with respect to property, there is a custom of their own, which has long subsisted with them, which, with great propriety and advantage, might be converted into a law; and that is with regard to deciding their differences by way of arbitration. To establish this under proper regulations, therefore, so as not to interfere with their casts and religions, would both be highly beneficial, and the more grateful, as it would be a law which they had been always, in a manner, accustomed to before.

As to the trade of salt, beetle-nut, and tobacco, the impolitic management of which, as is alledged, having so much been the topic of conversation, it may be expected, that in a disquisition of this nature, I should say something upon it; the rather too as I have not imputed the grievances of Bengal to this cause, though, I believe, it is here generally understood to have been one, and the very prin-

principal one also. This too, it may be thought, I have the greater call to do, as I resided long in the country, had dealt very largely myself in salt, and that the monopoly so much complained of put an entire stop to my trading in that article.

After all, however, on the most cool and impartial reflection, I do not think, that the monopoly, as instituted by lord Clive and the Select Committee, was so detrimental and ruinous to the country as has been asserted ; nay, I am rather of a contrary opinion ; for those articles were not only not sold dearer, but, indeed, at a lower rate, during the monopoly, at most places at least, than, at a medium, had been done for many years before ; while there was a fixed price upon them, which, no doubt, would have been of advantage to the people, had it been continued, particularly with regard to salt. As to the propriety or impropriety of the Company's allowing such a monopoly, and so great a revenue to their servants, it is foreign to my purpose to enquire into it here.

It is my opinion, however, that beetlenut and tobacco being the produce of the ground, and in that country, in a manner, as the necessaries of life, such as can be cultivated and raised in many places where they are not now, the monopoly of them at all is unjust and impolitic, a bar to industry, and hurt to the people. The trade in these articles ought to be left as free as possible therefore ; more especially if it be considered that they are no inconsiderable articles of export to the neighbouring and foreign nations.

As to salt, it is otherwise ; for it is made but in particular districts, while every person almost uses it in small, but nearly in equal quantities. It has been the policy of all wise governments, therefore, to draw a revenue, and a very considerable revenue from it. In some populous countries it is immense, without hurt to the people, or their scarce feeling it indeed. Why then, that the sovereigns of Bengal should not do the same, without injuring the people in any respect, I can see no just reason. The inequality of the price,

price, in an article that is constantly and universally used in small quantities, is the hardship, not an equal and uniform price, were it even greater than what it ever has been for some years past. It is the change, not the charge, in such an article, that is attended to, and which creates murmurs and discontent. For, if it only be considered, that few, if any, eat above an ounce of salt in a day, or so much perhaps; let it be supposed then, that the price of salt should be even at four rupees the maund; but the maund, by which salt is generally sold, is of eighty-two pounds; so that if we reckon the rupee even at half a crown, which it is not intrinsically worth, here will be nearly twelve ounces of salt for a penny, or what would serve an ordinary man for at least so many days. It is very evident, therefore, I think, that, in such an article, it must be the variableness, not the price, unless very extravagant indeed, that can at all cause uneasiness and discontent; an inconvenience which the present mode of carrying on the trade will always be subject to.

I am, on the whole, clearly of opinion then, that salt should, in some respect, both be under an excise and assize, which, if instituted right, and under proper regulations, suitable to the country and trade, would not only be an advantage to the people, but bring a considerable additional revenue to the treasury of the government. To execute this properly, however, requires a certain knowledge, and a minute local knowledge indeed, both of the country, of the people, and of the present method of conducting the trade of salt there; and that from the making of it, till it arrives on the frontiers of Bengal and provinces under the dominion of the Company, from whence it is wont to be exported, and in no inconsiderable quantities, to the other neighbouring nations. The quantity of salt made in the territories of the Company is immense, and might possibly be greatly increased. The manner of making it is very different from any thing practised in Europe, in the way of making salt; and the transport of it, when made, is over an extensive and populous coun-

country, and that at a great risk and charge. There is a small quantity also brought from Persia and the Coast of Coromandel ; but this is very inconsiderable with regard to the other, and of a quality somewhat different likewise, the former especially, which is mostly used as a medicine only.

To form any just estimate of the quantity of salt that is annually made in, and imported to Bengal, is here what is not in my power ; to give but a tolerable guess at it, is even what I am scarce able. All I can inform the reader of it is, that in one season, for it is made only at one particular season of the year, I made on my own account about twelve thousand tons, in which I employed about thirteen thousand people ; and then I looked upon it, that I had in that season near about a tenth part of the whole trade of salt-making in Bengal in my own hands. As to the imports from the Coast and Persia, I do not think, that, one year with another, they can amount to
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above three or four thousand tons, if so much.

Though I have already said, it is my humble opinion that this trade could, in no respect, be carried on to so much advantage, either to the Company or Country, as under a well-regulated affize and excise, or what would be something in the nature of those at least; yet I am sufficiently aware of the difficulties that must attend the forming of a right and regular plan for this purpose; and in such a manner as that both public and private should draw the greatest real benefit and advantage from the execution of it. To make this the more evident, and to throw light on what I have advanced, I shall here inform the reader of the whole trade of salt and salt-making, as it is at present carried on in Bengal, so far, at least, as I am acquainted with it, or that I can now recollect of the matter. The process itself being curious, will, I hope, be entertaining, and an apology to the reader for my troubling him with so long a digression. It is different

ferent entirely from any of the methods that are practised in Europe, or from any thing we have any account of as yet, so far as I know. It will thence appear evident, I imagine, that my assertions are founded upon truth ; and I shall thence also be enabled, I hope, to give some useful hints at least, in words that will then be understood, for forming a plan, and a rational consistent plan, easy to be executed, which would both be advantageous to the country, and bring a very considerable additional revenue to the treasury of the Company, and that at no great expence.

The places where the salt is now made in Bengal, are called the jungles or woods. These cover a large tract of country, most of which was formerly cultivated, and paid a very great revenue to the government, and that not two hundred years ago. They are now, however, from the ravages of pirates, and ill conduct of rulers perhaps, become the habitations solely of tigers and wild beasts, except only at the season when the salt-makers

gō there to cut wood and boil their salt ; or that either people come to deal with them, or pass through in boats, in going and coming from the eastern to the western parts of the province ; there being no travelling there, at any rate, but in boats.

The salt-makers, called molunghys, cultivate and inhabit the adjacent countries ; countries, which are much of the same nature with the jungles, only that the grounds in those are cleared, and that the salt water is kept out from them by means of banks of earth, which are every year repaired ; they being broke down again in certain places when the rains come on, to let out the water from their rice-grounds, where it would otherwise rise too high.

Some time before the rice is cut down, or about the end of the month of October, the merchants who are to hire them, or their own head-men, called holdars, engage the men who are to work at each calary, or salt-work, by giving them a small advance. This, by the merchant, is given mostly in money to the holdars ; and that at the cutchery or public office
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of the district; where a register either is, or ought to be kept of every calary, and the number of people who are to work it. The holdar again, at this time, gives, or is supposed to give, a small proportion to each of his workmen, according to their occupation or expertness, in fire-working, wood-cutting, building, and so forth. This, however, is more commonly paid by degrees, in rice, oil, tobacco, and other necessaries, than in money; where the arts of fraud and imposition are no ways neglected.

The next advance is commonly made them in December, when the rice-season is mostly over. And they ought then by rights to proceed to cut their fewel, and to make the other necessary preparations for building their houses and calaries, which is an annual task. There are some calaries, indeed, of a smaller kind; and near their habitations, in certain districts, which have all ready, and begin to boil in December; but these having fewer pots, make less salt than the others, which are worked farther in the woods.

In January, or February, when they get their next advance, every thing should be prepared, and their pots too ought to be ready to take along with them. These are made of burnt earth, somewhat in the shape of a cucurbit, and contain each about three pints, or two quarts at most. The calaries are formed of them, which contain from one hundred to twelve hundred pots each. They are built up with clay, in a circular and pyramidal form, the under circles containing the greatest numbers, and the others gradually diminishing, till they terminate in a hole, left at the top to let out the smoke. The pots thus, with their clay cement, form a kind of vaulted furnace for the fuel, which is put in at an opening below, made for that purpose; tiles being used as regulators, both for this and the opening a-top. Such is the general form of the calaries; though some, indeed, are made in an oblong and pyramidal form, but upon the same principle entirely; with nothing more than some little variation in the size or in the number of the pots.

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While the calary, the house they are to live in, and the salt-gola, or place for keeping the salt, are a-making, they prepare the earth, from which they make the lye, to be boiled into salt, in the following manner, to wit: They first level a piece of ground, and make a salt-pond, as it may be called, from fifty to a hundred yards square; more or less, according to the size of their calary; the bottom of which is of beat mud, or clay, such as they find by the river side. Over this they lay loose earth; to which, at spring-tides, they let in the water, which is salt, to the depth of a few inches. The water, when exhaled, leaves their earth impregnated with salt, which they carefully gather up. Having then prepared a small mound of earth, of about four feet high, and six or eight feet over; on the top of which there is made a hollow, of about a foot deep, inclining a little to one side, where there is a perforation and reed, that conveys to a receiver below. On the hollow of this mound, they lay small twigs of trees and straw, to serve as a filter; and

upon these the prepared and impregnated earth; on which they pour water to dissolve the salt, which passes thence through the reed to the receiver, in a strong and pure lye. The lye they carry to the pots in the calary, to be boiled into salt; gradually filling them up, and removing the salt as it is made, till the whole is consumed; which is called one boiling.

A calary of five hundred pots, properly managed, if I remember right, will make, at one boiling, full fifty maunds of salt, of eighty-two pounds each. In six boilings then, which takes up three months, and six spring tides, each calary of five hundred pots, that is but tolerably managed, will easily make three hundred maunds, or about eleven ton weight. The calaries, of one hundred pots, do not make so much in proportion; while those of a thousand, and twelve hundred pots, exceed them greatly; which is entirely owing to the number of people employed in the dispatch of the business. For a small calary, which should have four, seldom has more than two hands; and one
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of five hundred pots, which ought to have eight men, has not often more than five or six; while the largest calaries of all are always well manned, having seldom fewer than a dozen; by which means, the fewel is cut, the ground is prepared, and the whole business goes on with much greater expedition.

The salt-boiling business is mostly put a stop to, when the rains set in, which is generally about the middle, or towards the end of June; though, if they have prepared earth in time, and are careful, they may continue boiling still a few weeks longer, which is the utmost that they can do.

The ground where the salt is in general made, and lodged at first, during the rains, is liable to be overflowed; while their golas, or warehouses there, are not sufficiently secured from inundation. The sooner, therefore, they can get it conveyed away to a place of safety, it is so much the better. And the people, who are industrious, take care to do this in time,
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when many, who are negligent, often lose all, or the greatest part of what they had prepared. For each calary, in the woods, having a boat belonging to it, one or two persons should be constantly employed, to transport the salt to the merchant who has engaged it, or to a place of safety, so soon as it is made.

In the year 1763, I hired of the Company eleven hundred twenty-six calaries and a half of the large kind, which ought, or were supposed to have had eight men each. I hired, at the same time, of small calaries, above nine hundred, which ought, or were supposed to have had four men each. I employed to look after them, and for other necessary purposes, besides a few Europeans, a very great multitude of boat-men, peons, banians, &c. The people of the large calaries were so much dispersed in the woods, which are cut by innumerable natural canals, or nullas, as they are there called, that it took my principal overseer full fourteen days to go round them. The
small

small calaries, being nearer together, could be all visited in the course of a few days only. From some of the large calaries, I had five hundred maunds of salt delivered me. Many of them, however, though they should all have given, at least, two hundred maunds, for which I had paid them in advance, gave me scarce one hundred altogether. While some, which had had a like advance, and ought not, or had not, perhaps, less than five hundred pots, gave me not one grain at all. So that though I put all the watches and checks upon them that I possibly could think of, yet, I received only, upon a medium, about two hundred and fifty maunds, of eighty-two pounds weight, from each. From the small calaries, many of which had above two hundred pots, though I am persuaded they made more than what they gave to me, I had only, on an average, about fifty maunds from each. Such are the salt-makers, or molughys, and such the methods of carrying on their business in Bengal.

From what I have related of the nature of salt-making, it will appear pretty evident, I imagine, how difficult it would be in that country, to put an excise upon it, on the principles of any excise laws that are established in Europe, which would at all answer the intention; so as not to be either oppressive to the people, or more expensive to the government, than what it would be worth; or both. To me it is clearly so; more especially when I consider the temper and disposition of the Bengals; where an army of excise-men would be neither more or less than an army of idle thieves and harpies; who would oppress, distress, and sell their vigilance to those who would be ever ready to buy, without caring much for the government, or any thing else, indeed, but that of getting what they could for themselves. And were the excise to be managed by farmers, the revenue would be rather better perhaps, but not so the people; for the farmers, no doubt, would give more attention to every minute article. Yet this could never be done to
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any purpose, however, without an immense multitude of servants, who would never sure be more tender of the molung-hys, or more honest themselves, than what the servants of the government might be supposed would be. But farther, if we should even imagine, that an excise could be established without these inconveniencies, there is still another difficulty that would remain, which it would be no easy matter to overcome, and that is what would arise from the poverty of the salt-makers, and their inherent disposition to artifice and deceit; for, as it would be impossible for them to pay the excise all at once in money, at the salaries where it is made; while the keeping of it there, as has been said, would expose it to be destroyed; bonds could therefore only be taken for the payment of it. The recovery of which would be difficult, vexatious, and even often impossible. A fact, which every one any ways acquainted with the bonds and security of Bengalmen will readily admit. Yet, if the excise-office should ever once be allowed to

run in arrear, it would be almost impossible to hinder it from increasing yearly; which would both be a hurt to the government, and give a handle to the officers of the revenue, to harrafs, oppress, and commit a thousand abuses on the people.

The plan then, that I would propose, for eviting all those inconveniencies, should be this :—I would be for having the calaries let out, in the districts where the molunghys reside, to the head-men amongst them, either holdars or merchants, and to none but those who resided there; and that not above a certain number, as for example, ten, at most, to any one single person. These might be either let at auction, or for the first year or two, and till that the people could the better comprehend the benefit and advantage that was to result to them, they might be let on the most moderate terms; and on such, as that they themselves should approve of; and that on a rent to be paid in salt to the Company, deliverable at certain places and times. The quantity of
salt,

salt, that a calary of any determinate size can make in a season, is well known to the people there, as well as the expence. From the larger kind which I employed, I have said, that I received only at a medium, about two hundred and fifty maunds; though I am convinced, and was certainly informed, that there was a great deal more made. The price from me to the holdars, or head-molunghys for this, was twenty-five or thirty rupees, the hundred maunds; which, however, I cannot quite with certainty recollect, having not here my books with me; tho', I think, it was rather the former. Supposing, therefore, that such a quantity may be made, in those of five hundred pots, for example, I would propose to let them as above, for two hundred maunds of clean salt, to be paid to the Company: the remainder being to remain with the purchaser of the calary, with leave to sell it, at any price, not exceeding two rupees the maund, which should be the Company's selling price. The more too, to encourage them, and to prevent their being

tempted to cheat, I would propose, that what farther good and clean salt they had made above the two hundred maunds, and were desirous immediately to dispose of, it should be taken off their hands by the Company, at one rupee twelve anas, or one rupee three fourths, the maund.

As to the affize to be put on it, having already mentioned the price at the Company's warehouses, I shall next proceed to consider that to be fixed on it at different places; which must, no doubt, be in proportion to the distance, charge, and risk of transporting it; so that a suitable reward may be left to industry, without burdening the people. And here I shall only take for example two places, to wit, Patna and Calcutta, the charges and risk of transporting to which I am sufficiently acquainted with. The charges then of carrying it to the former of these, I look upon it to be about six anas the maund. It may be done for less, perhaps; but I have paid myself sometimes twelve; tho' oftener, indeed, eight than any other rate, when I contracted for the transport of it;

where

where the contractors must always have had a profit. Eight anas, or half a rupee, therefore, I shall suppose to be for the freight. The risk and loss is next to be determined ; the former of which I look upon to be ten per cent. and the latter is allowed to be the same by custom. For where the boats are not lost or damaged, which is often the case, and that the burdars, or those who have the charge of them and the cargo, deliver within ten per cent. of what they received, it is presumed that they have acted honestly. Tho' it is well known, that where boats are good, and the people really honest, there will not be a loss of two per cent. in the whole transport of it to Patna, from the places where I suppose the Company's warehouses to be. Here would be forty-five per cent. on the first cost then ; to which may be added, for the use of money and encouragement of industry, thirty per cent. more ; so that the assize at Patna, according to my plan, should be three rupees and a half the maund, a price which,

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I am certain, can no ways be complained of.

In estimating the affize to be fixed at Calcutta, I would proceed on the same principle; and, from what I know of the matter, I should reckon the risk and charge of transport at four anas on the maund; to which there may be added four, or, at most, six anas more for the use of money and encouragement of industry. The affize at Calcutta, therefore, ought to be, at this rate, two rupees and a half, or two rupees ten anas at most. The same manner of calculating would hold good as to other places; it being always understood, that both with respect to these already mentioned, and to all others, nothing of this kind could ever be settled with so much precision and exactness here, as there upon the spot.

It may be thought, however, that in leaving so great a latitude for charges, industry, and the use of money, there could be no kind of occasion for an affize at all; as with such allowances it could never rise

so high, but would probably always be considerably under such prices. Yet to those who are acquainted with Bengal, it will appear otherwise, and in the same light as it does to me, I imagine ; for, in a country where power has such influence, and that combinations are so common, it would be no difficult matter, in many places, were there no fixed assize, to get the trade into the hands of a few, and prevent the poorer people from meddling in it till that it were raised to an exorbitant price. Whereas an assize, as is proposed, would not only effectually hinder this, but rather throw the trade into the hands of the poorer sort ; seeing it would thus scarce be worth the while of the rich and powerful to be concerned in it on so bad a footing ; more especially as they could never carry it on to so much advantage by agents, whom they must employ, as the others, who would both fetch it and sell it upon their own account.

The advantages that would result from such regulations and such an arrangement, with regard to the trade of salt, are many
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and evident; for first, it could be easily executed, and at no great expence, a most material consideration in the taxation laws of any country; though more so, perhaps, in a conquered country, where the sovereigns are foreigners and strangers. Next, I think, none would have any reason to complain, but rather otherwise; for those at a distance from where the salt was made would pay no more, and scarce even so much for it, than what they had done formerly; while the poor and industrious amongst them might do what they could never do before, make good bread of it, in an easy manner, by only bringing and selling it. Whereas the molunghys, or salt-makers again, and those near the places where it was made, would reap an immediate advantage from it, and have a no small spur to industry. For, having already mentioned that a calary of five hundred pots, tolerably managed, can with ease make two hundred and fifty maunds of salt, fifty maunds of which being allowed for the making, at two rupees the maund, here would be two hundred rupees for two hun-

hundred and fifty maunds, a price much greater than to them was ever given before, besides the large field that would be left for the industry of a set of people, who are of more consequence to the government than is perhaps thought of, or imagined; it being very certain, that if ever the uncultivated lands, now called jungles, should come to be meliorated and improved, it must done by the encrease and encouragement of the people in the neighbourhood of them, who are principally the molunghys or people in question. For their greater benefit and support therefore, a few useful laws and regulations might be made, touching the wages of the poorer amongst them, which, I am persuaded, would be of great advantage to them.

If we next take a view of the profit and benefit that would immediately arise to the Company from the proposed plan executed with judgment and prudence, the intelligent reader will easily see the propriety of speedily adopting it; for, as the quantity of salt made in Bengal is very great, and that there would thus four

fifths, or what I shall call only two thirds, of it come to the Company without any risk at all, and with no great charge, to be sold out again at two rupees the maund ; so, if the guess I have ventured at should be in any degree near the truth, it must follow, that there would be about eighty thousand tons paid to the Company, which, only at six pounds the ton, would amount to four hundred and eighty thousand pounds, and which, all charges defrayed, would still certainly exceed four hundred thousand pounds, or the sum that is now paid to the government. The Company would hence too come in a few years to know pretty nearly both the quantity consumed and the quantity made ; the latter of which they could always proportion to the former, by increasing or diminishing the number of calarys, or rather, according to my way of thinking, by increasing or diminishing the number of pots in each calary ; so that the molunghys, or salt-makers, might all constantly be employed. The Company, from this also, would have it
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in their power, and, no doubt, ought to keep always in their warehouses a certain quantity more than what was needed, in case of a year of scarcity, which will happen, in some degree, at any time when the rains come on much sooner than they are usually expected.

In the execution of all new establishments, those especially in which such numbers are concerned, many difficulties, and unforeseen difficulties, will almost always arise; but these will ever be fewer, and more easy to be overcome, in proportion to the knowledge and discernment of those by whom they are established, and to the steadiness and abilities of those whose conduct the executive part may be intrusted to. That I am thoroughly acquainted with what I have here wrote with regard to salt, is, I flatter myself, what will scarce be denied me. That the plan proposed is therefore just and rational in all its parts, or that I may have explained myself in terms sufficiently clear and distinct, is what will be judged of by others; and though it is a plan, which, I have the vanity to think,

think, I could, with proper assistance, execute completely and effectually to the utmost of what I have asserted can be done; yet that too must be judged of by those who may see things in very different lights, and that, perhaps, too in lights, both stronger and better than any thing I am now capable of discerning.

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